

KOREA IN 1909

SOME NEW ASPECTS OF THE HERMIT KINGDOM
WHICH IS PASSING INTO THE HANDS OF JAPAN.

Special Correspondence.

SEOUL, Korea, April 1.—How would you like to be a bone-eating dog? This has been the position of Korea in the past, and it will probably be so in the future. The country lies at just the right place to be the battlefield of three nations. It hangs down like a great nose on the east face of Asia, its bottom almost touching the hungry, overcrowded empire of Japan. Its top ends at Manchuria, beyond which is Siberia, beyond that the vast horde of almond-eyed subjects who are just beginning to adopt the modern civilization and will soon covet the world. All of these powers would like to chew at the bone of Korea. The Chinese dog is still too weak to more than snarl at it, and Russia, for the time, has been driven back by the iron teeth of Japan. The sweet morsel now lies in the paws of the latter, and she is wondering whether she dare eat it or not.

KOREA'S PAST TROUBLES.

Korea has been ravaged by Japan and China again and again. The Japanese came here as far back as A. D. 200 and under the Empress Jingo conquered the country. About 100 years after Columbus discovered America they again overran it under their "Monkey-faced General" Hideyoshi, who had taken an army across the strait, intending to proceed onward to the conquest of China. I am not sure during this invasion it was that the Koreans took the skins of the Japanese and used them for drumheads, and the Japanese, in turn, carried back home with them several hundred thousand human ears which they buried near one of their temples in the city of Kyoto. During both invasions, however, Korea suffered greatly, as she did also in her troubles with China.

The Chinese practically controlled Korea up to the war with Japan, and that war was brought about over disputes as to the rights of the Japanese here. I was in the country when the war broke out, and the King of Korea then sending tribute to Peking. Yuan-Shih-Kai, who was consul general from China to Korea, was then practically the dictator of this country's foreign policy, and he had a way of riding with his retinue through the main gate of the palace which etiquette and custom prescribe for his majesty alone.

After the war, the Japanese took the lead and began to bulldoze Korea. At the same time, Russia drew nearer and nearer the bone and began to chew round the edges. She was planning the taking possession of certain islands

when the Japanese declared war upon her, and the result was the great fight in Manchuria, which has now thrown Korea into the paws of Japan.

WILL JAPAN EAT KOREA?

The live question before the world today is whether the great Japanese dog will eat this fat and juicy Korea. I have come here to find out, and in these letters hope to tell you of just what the morsel consists of and all I can learn as to its prospective mastication. During the past few months I have been traveling in Japan, and if hunger is any index, there is no question but that Korea will eventually pass in the Japanese stomach. Just now the government is acting somewhat on the humanitarian plan which we have adopted as to the Philippine Islands. This was originated by Prince Ito, and, as it is being carried out in good faith. The situation, however, is such that it is doubtful whether this can be long continued.

Let me give you one phrase of it in a nutshell. Japan now has 50,000,000 of the most industrious, most aggressive and most enterprising souls upon earth, and to these she is adding 500,000 more in birth every year. All these are confined to a country about the size of California, a country so mountainous that its good farming land is only 12,000,000 acres. Collected in one place, it would be about half the size of Kentucky, and this small area is now supporting the whole 50,000,000. If all the land were divided equally there would only be one-quarter acre per head and the holdings all told average less than two acres in size. Suppose you were to cut our farmers' holdings down to two acres each and put the whole American people into Kentucky, you would have about the conditions that prevail in Japan. At the same time, imagine that Indiana, just over the Ohio river, had a more fertile soil and that it was half tilled, with much land lying vacant. Could any one keep the Kentucky man out of it?

THE JAPANESE IMMIGRATION.

Well, that is just about the condition of Japan and Korea. The strait which flows between the countries can be crossed in a night, and today the Japanese are immigrating in great numbers and gradually taking possession of this territory which they have gotten through their struggle with Russia. There are already outside the officials and army, 150,000 of them on the ground, and they are rapidly changing the face of the country. They have their settlements in all the large centers. I found Fusan a new city when I landed there a few weeks ago. Instead of mud huts, thatched with straw, running along dirty alleys, covered with filth, a new Japanese city had been built, wide streets, as clean as a Dutch

The Japanese Immigration and the Conditions of Today—A Bird's-eye View of the Country—A Land of Few Cities and Thousands of Villages—Its Forests and Farms—Something About the People—Transportation and Travel—The New Roads, Etc.



A SINGLE ANIMAL WILL CARRY ALMOST 1,000 POUNDS.

kitchen floor, crossed one another at right angles, running far up the hills. There were many two-story buildings, and some with all kinds of goods. I rode several miles through business streets of one kind and another, passed several schools and a big city building, and finally stopped at a three-story structure which proved to be a commercial museum, containing every variety of goods, both Japanese and Korean. There were samples of Korean cotton and Korean silk, and many suggestions to the natives as to how they might develop their country.

At Taiku, a city of 50,000, a hundred miles further north, there is another large Japanese settlement, and Japanese cities have sprung up at Pyengyang in the north, and Gensan in the south. Pyengyang is the biggest town between Seoul and the Yalu. Previous to the Japan-China war it contained 30,000 people, and it is now the third largest city in the empire. It lies on the right bank of the Taidong river, some distance inland from the sea, and its situation is such that some think it will eventually be the biggest town in Korea. It has already in the neighborhood of 10,000 Japanese settlers, and a section devoted to them has been laid out near the station and is fast building up. Public buildings have been erected. The Dai-Ichi Ginko has erected a new bank building close to the gate and the settlement has a city hall, a clubhouse, a theater and a government hospital. Schools for both Japanese and Koreans are going up and the dry bones of the natives are beginning to shake at the changes.

There are now between 5,000 and 10,000 Japanese at Gensan on the west coast, and there are 20,000 or more here at Seoul, with another wide as from at Champo, on the Yellow sea, 25 miles away. More than 30,000 immigrants came in last year and the prospects are for a steady increase from now on. This is especially so from the fact that a big colonization company, backed by the government, has been formed in Japan. This has a capital of \$5,000,000, and it will exploit the crown lands which were taken charge of under certain conditions by the Japanese after the abdication of the old emperor now almost two years ago.

A LOOK AT KOREA.

But first let me give you a bird's-eye view of Korea. The peninsula is of about the same shape as Florida, and its area, all told, is about that of Kansas. It is as long from north to south as from New York to Cleveland and in some places as wide as from Washington to Philadelphia. The country lies just opposite our eastern state on the other side of the globe. If I could bore a hole right through the earth from where I know am and had the right sort of lamp I might see the American sun within a short distance of New York City. The latitude is just about the same as that of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, and the climate is better than ours. For the greater part of the year the skies are as blue as those of Colorado, and then it rains for two or three months off and on, giving a plentiful supply of water for crops. If the mountains had not been skinned of their timber the rainfall is such that they might be cultivated clear to their tops, and by reforestation such farming will probably be done.

A LAND OF MOUNTAINS.

Korea, like Japan, is a land of mountains, but the mountains are less steep and there are more broad, open valleys. There is a range which runs north and south from Manchuria to the Strait of Korea, with spurs branching off here and there. The range is not lofty. There are but few peaks a mile above the sea, and the highest of them all is only 8,000 feet. This is Mount Paik-Tu-San, an extinct volcano, whose crater is filled with water, forming a beautiful lake of unknown depth. The average hills are below the altitude of the Blue Ridge in Virginia, and some slope off into plains. All of these mountains were at one time well wooded. There were forests from one end of the peninsula to the other, and the farms ran up the sides of the hills. Today in the central and lower parts of Korea the tops of the ridges are as bare as the desert of Sahara, and there is only a thin growth of pines on the sides. This is so all the way from Manchuria to the Strait of Korea, at the capital, which lies in a basin surrounded by mountains, the most of the hills are as bare as the Rockies, and the clay has been washed down into the valleys. Trees grow easily, but the people skin the mountains year after year of every bit of vegetation in order that it may be used for fuel. First they cut down the trees. Later they chop away the sprouts and young growth and finally pull up the grass until the country looks as though it had been plowed over.

HOW KOREA KEEPS WARM.

At this writing the streets of Seoul are filled with bullocks, ponies and men loaded with fuel which they have brought into the city for sale. Porters go along with cartloads of evergreen branches fastened to the disjunct part of framework which they wear upon their backs. Bullocks by scores are en-

tirely covered with bundles of similar fuel. A single animal will carry almost 1,000 pounds, or as much as one horse could haul in a cart in our country. Indeed, the load is so large that you could not put it into an American cart. It rises six or eight feet above the back of the bullock, and hangs down on the sides almost to his feet, so that one sees little more than his head, tail and hoofs as he goes along the road. There are ponies carrying wood, chopped into stove lengths and tied up in bundles, and men laden with charcoal which has been made in the hills. The chief form of heating here is by flues which run under the floor, and straw, twigs and pine branches are excellent for this purpose. A bunch is put in at the entrance of the flues and lighted, and its flames spread out, making the floors hot almost to roasting. One of the first stops this skinning of the mountains. They will plant trees as fast as possible upon the available hills, thus conserving the rainfall and increasing the land susceptible to cultivation. They have already planted model forests in the vicinity of Seoul, Pyengyang and Taiku, and as soon as the nurseries are in good shape they will begin to plant them in other parts of the country.

THE FARMS OF KOREA.

Today most of the farms of Korea are confined to the valleys. The area being cultivated is just about half that which is tilled in Japan, and if it were as intensively farmed it would be feeding 25,000,000 people instead of less than 15,000,000, as now. I am told that the soil here is naturally much better than that of Japan, but I doubt if the product is one-fourth as large. The farmers are fertile but little and they know nothing of artificial manures. During a recent trip over the country I saw men carrying manure from the villages to the fields on their backs, and farther on bullocks were used for the purpose, the stuff being loaded into baskets of straw rope which hung down on each side of the animal.

Everywhere the methods of cultivation were crude. The plows were little more than forked sticks shod with iron. They are one-handed affairs, drawn by bullocks, reminding one of the plows of the Scriptures. Much of the country is hoed over by men and women. The clouds are broken up with mallets, which the people swing back and forth as they walk through the furrows. There is no machinery of any kind. The grain is all sowed by hand. It is thrashed with flails and winnowed in the wind, the grain and chaff being of straw which is blown into the air.

The contrast between the country scenes of Japan and Korea is striking. Everything in the former country shines with thrift. There is not a weed in the fields, the houses are neat and well built and the people clean and rosy from the hot baths they take every day. All farming here is done in the most slovenly way. The methods of taxation, however, have been such as to leave but little incentive to work, and the bulk of the profits have gone to the officials. The farmhouses are mean. They are squalid huts of mud and stone with roofs of straw thatched on with strings. They are collected together in little villages which often nestle on the sides of the hills. There are no trees or gardens about them. Every home is surrounded by a mud wall high enough to keep the men on the streets from looking in at the girls. The streets are winding alleys, where the garbage of the houses is thrown out to rot in the sun. Sometimes ditches

run along the sides of the streets serving as sewers, and the houses have no sanitary arrangements whatever. The conditions are so bad that typhoid, cholera and dysentery are of frequent appearance and smallpox is almost universal. Nearly every other face one sees is more or less pock-marked, and parents, I am told, do not count their children as permanent possibilities until after they have had that disease. These are some of the conditions of this country which Japan is trying to make over.

A LAND WITHOUT ROADS.

As to other things, Korea in many respects is worse off than the Philippines. There are practically no roads. The only ways from place to place are by bridge paths with fords across the streams. Now and then one finds a rude bridge two or three feet wide, propped up on poles, and again he has to make his way over such streams by stepping stones or be carried across on the backs of men. Practically all transportation away from the railroads is by pack bullocks, ponies and porters. All these carry great loads, and the men will take as much as 500 pounds at a pinch. There is a big guild of porters. Its men are found in every city and village and can be seen everywhere carrying great loads over the country. One of the first things that the Japanese will do will be to make wagon roads, and military highways, connecting all parts of Korea. I understand they are building some now, and that four main lines are to be constructed. A number of new railroads have been planned and several started. This is in

addition to the 600-mile line now in operation. At present Japan is so poor that she cannot push this feature of her work, but it is her intention to extend the railroads at the earliest possible time.

THE PEOPLE OF KOREA.

I have space here for only a word about the people of Korea. They are among the queerest and most interesting of the Asiatic races and have great possibilities. As to their number, a census was taken some time ago and the count made 10,000,000. They have been so squeezed and ground down by taxation, however, that they will not give out the full number of souls in each house, and the probability is that there are many more than were counted. A fair estimate, I am told, would be 14,000,000. The Koreans themselves estimate their population at 20,000,000, but their figures are of little value, as they have no basis to go on.

The most of these people live in villages such as I have described. There are no very large cities. Seoul has now perhaps a quarter of a million, although the census gave it only about 200,000. Pyengyang has 60,000, Taiku 50,000, and after that come Chemulpo, Fusan, Gensan and Songdo.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS.

The people are divided into classes, and, formerly, the emperor and the nobility owned most of the lands and held all the offices. They have been the curse of the country and have squeezed the others unmercifully. The nobility until now have gone about dressed in silks and fine grass cloths, with a lot of retainers about them. They have had coolies with them to hold up their arms as they walked, and if they rode, a servant would go along on each side of the horse to see that they did not fall from the saddle. They did absolutely no work and considered it a disgrace to carry a bundle. The boys who went to the modern school, established by the emperor, took servants along with them to carry their pencils and papers and some tramped to the school building through the rain, because they would not endure the disgrace of carrying an umbrella.

This sentiment prevails somewhat today, although it is fast disappearing. By the coming of the Japanese the most of the nobility have lost their fat incomes and the farmers and common

people are now to have a better show. It is claimed that they are being oppressed by the Japanese, but they cannot possibly be as bad as it has been in the past and the dawn of freedom seems to be breaking. The Japanese are establishing courts in the cities, and they propose to thoroughly reorganize the government of the provinces as well as that here at Seoul. FRANK G. CAREPENTER.

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